

From: Casso, Ruben
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To: Dellinger, Philip
Subject: Despite SMU study linking quakes and gas drilling, Texas OKs two injection wells

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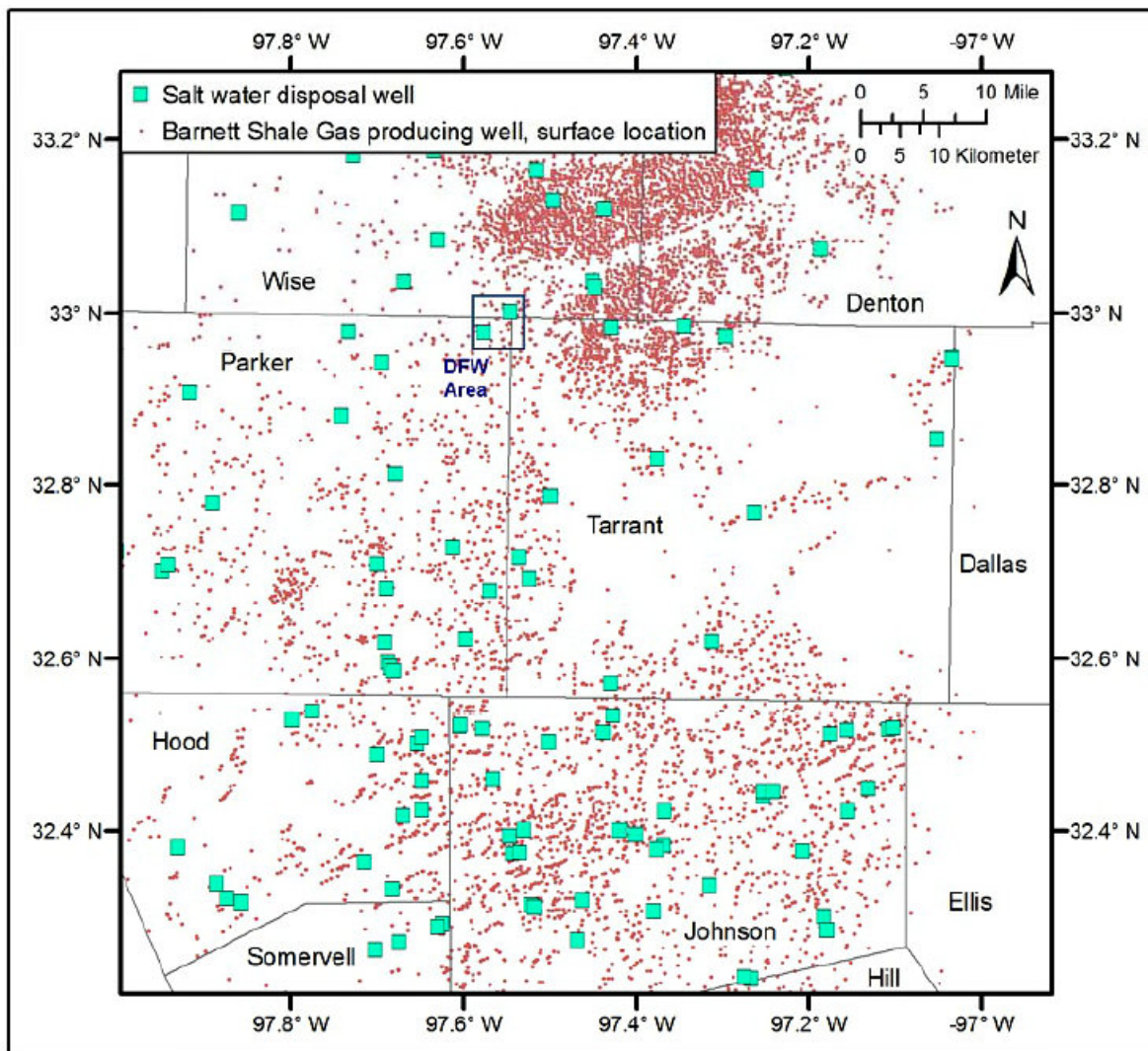


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From the report: Map of oil and gas wells (red dots) and salt water disposal wells (green boxes) in Tarrant and surrounding counties in Texas.

This morning, the Texas Railroad Commission met to consider, among other things, whether two wastewater injection wells in Parker County are responsible for earthquakes in that stretch of North Texas. SMU seismologist say they are. Railroad commission technical examiners say they aren't.

Related

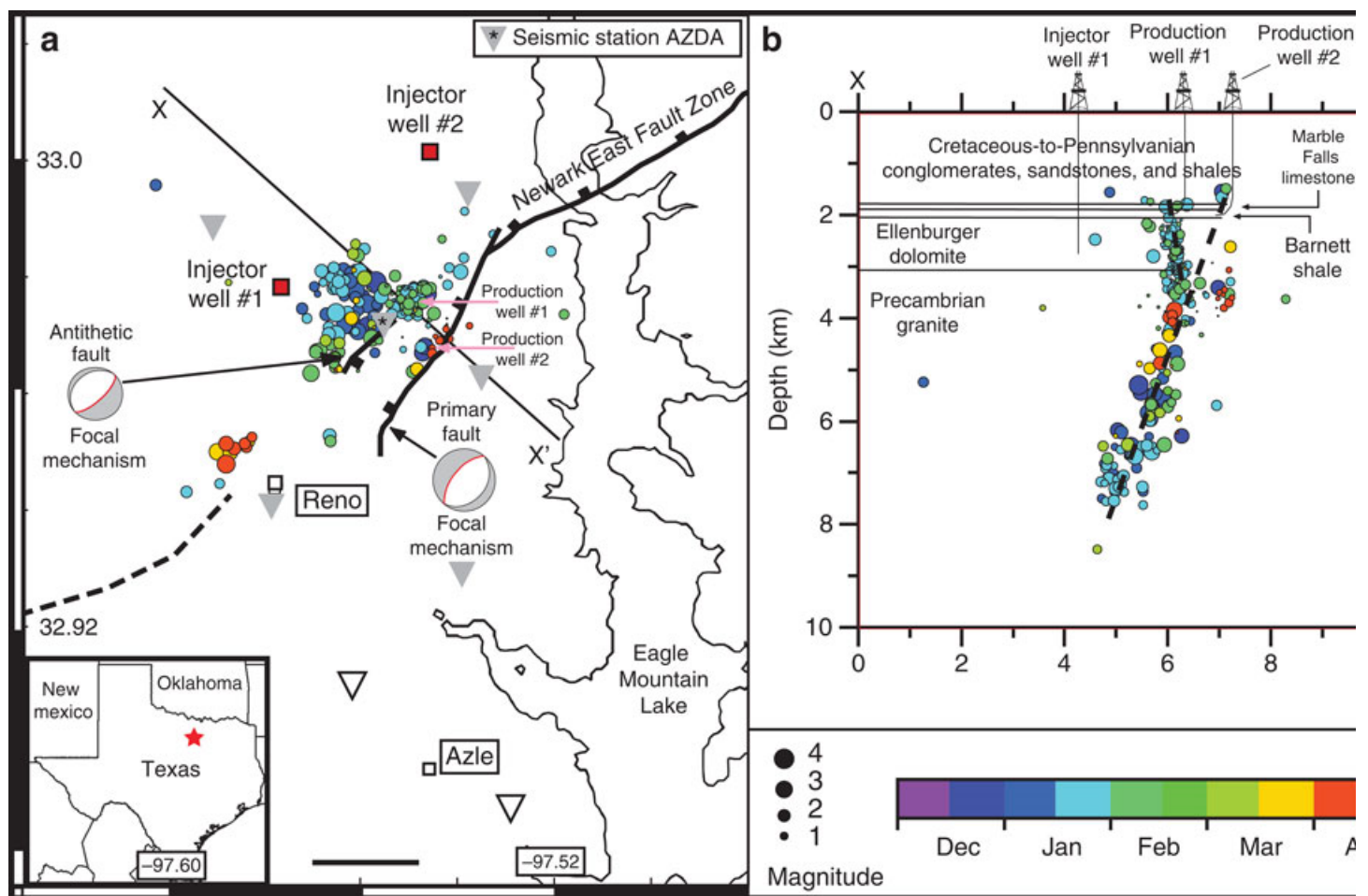
- Azle earthquakes likely caused by oil and gas operations, study says
- Railroad Commission moves to shut down wells linked to quakes
- Railroad Commission again finds oil and gas industry not to blame for quakes

The three Republican commissioners sided with their people this morning, unanimously. That means XTO Energy and EnerVest will be allowed to continue operating injection wells just west of Eagle Mountain Lake in Tarrant and Parker counties.

At this morning's meeting, a technical examiner told the commission that there have been quakes and a study linking the injection wells to the quakes and hearings about the quakes, which, of course, the commissioners already knew. He called the connection between wells and quakes "lacking." Commissioner Ryan Sitton made the motion to OK the wells and said the examiners did "a really good job of digging into the technical meat of this issue" and throwing out oil and gas drilling as a probable cause.

Sitton is from Irving.

We asked SMU's seismologist for a response following this morning's vote. The statement, from university spokesperson Kim Cobb, was a brief one: "The SMU seismology team stands by the conclusions presented in the peer-reviewed study of the Azle earthquakes published April 21, 2015 in *Nature Communications*."



From the SMU report, a map showing the Azle quakes in relation to the injection wells

That's the study that took a long, hard look at dozens of quakes that began rumbling through Azle in November 2013, shortly before Dallas and Irving were swarmed by a seemingly never-ending series of small quakes. The study concluded that the Azle quakes were directly linked to the disposal wells operated by XTO, the Fort Worth subsidiary of Exxon Mobil, and Houston-based EnerVest. The SMU study took a year to prepare, involved 11 researchers from SMU, the

University of Texas at Austin and the U.S. Geological Survey and was reviewed by independent experts before publication this spring.

Sucking oil and gas out of the ground and then forcing wastewater back into the ground “seems to have triggered the earthquakes, and that was a real surprise to us,” said Matthew Hornbach, a geophysicist at SMU and a lead author of the paper. The railroad commission’s seismologist said he didn’t agree; so too the energy providers; so too the commission’s panel of examiners, whose report insisted “the seismic activity is solely the result of natural tectonic processes.”

SMU is still working to determine the cause of the Irving and Dallas quakes.